



Community information networks: the KwaMashu gang monitoring project

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The Network of Independent Monitors (NIM) was set up in 1992 as a national network of human rights organisations to monitor political violence.¹ Its primary objective was to help create an environment for free political activity. This was done by:

- Monitoring political events in areas where intimidation and violence were a problem.
- Facilitating investigations into acts of serious political violence. This became necessary to break the cycles of impunity that characterised the years preceding the first democratic elections of 1994. The process involved identifying key witnesses and linking them to trustworthy and competent investigation bodies.

Much effort was devoted to developing community networks that could supply accurate information about the security situation in their areas. NIM's investigation work was integrated into an overall monitoring strategy that used the community network to help prevent violence. On the basis of information received, pressure would be placed on the police and defence force to deploy forces to an area to stop violence. Their responses would then be monitored.

This work led to the development of a rudimentary early warning system in KwaZulu-Natal. The prevention ethos underlying the system and the importance of maintaining an accurate flow of information came to influence all areas of NIM's work.

Gang violence in KwaMashu

As political violence subsided after 1994 in the KwaMashu township outside Durban, criminal activity involving armed groups increased. The problem of violent gang crime was aggravated by the nature of the local police and their relations with the community.

Members of the South African Police Service (SAPS) in KwaMashu were drawn from the former KwaZulu Police Force (KZP) who, at the height of apartheid, policed the

so-called KwaZulu homeland. In the 1980s and early 1990s the KZP was involved in, and often led, violent pro-Inkatha Freedom Party attacks against this largely ANC-supporting community that was protected by its own paramilitary structures. Even after 1994, the SAPS in KwaMashu was perceived to be incompetent, corrupt and at best indifferent to the plight of this crime-ridden community.

During an explosion of gang and vigilante violence between 1996 and 1997, NIM was requested by individual community members and councillors to assist in stopping the violence.

NIM's approach of informally partnering investigators with witnesses had shown some successes in the area. One of the first and most important cases was the landmark 'KwaMashu Five' case in which the 1994 killers of a group of ANC election canvassers were convicted. The conviction was secured after NIM facilitated contact between a perpetrator, who turned state witness and ensured the success of the case, and a police investigation unit, directed from within a hostile institutional environment by Deputy Attorney-General Chris McAdam.² This, together with ongoing monitoring of the township, enabled NIM to develop some credibility in KwaMashu.

Most of the violence was occurring in L-Section, where as many as 200 people were killed in under a year (see box on page 85). Collecting accurate information about the violence was difficult. NIM, working with elected councillors from the area, made a number of interventions. Although these did not end the violence, they did go some way towards alleviating it.

From 1995 NIM helped publicise the extent and causes of the violence in the local media.³ This helped to pressurise the SAPS into taking action, thereby demonstrating the will of the police and government to deal with the violence.⁴ A satellite police station was set up in L-Section in 1996. The arrests of key perpetrators and recovery of illegal weapons helped to stabilise the area for a time.

More recently, nationally driven police strategies such as Operation Crackdown helped stabilise the area enough to enable people to work there with a relative degree of security. It also gave many of those trying to combat the violence an opportunity to engage with NIM.

The Crusante/Ferange gang conflict

The KwaMashu police estimate that over 200 people have died as a result of this conflict between 1995 and 2001.

Crusante means insect, specifically the insects commonly found in the beans given to Umkhonto we Sizwe (MK) trainees in exile. It became a derogatory term used by MK personnel to refer to MK trainees. In 1993 the ANC called all sections of KwaMashu to recruit for MK. After recruits were given basic training, the commanders decreed that only persons who had received this training and belonged to a paramilitary structure could possess a firearm, whether licenced or not. The paramilitaries or Crusante were dispatched to collect the unauthorised guns.

This and the following event were to raise tensions in the community and eventually lead to gang conflict: while the paramilitaries were undertaking vigorous early morning exercises near a bus stop, commuters laughed at them. On seeing this, the commanders ordered their men to attack the commuters.

Conflict over this incident and the confiscation of weapons escalated. The Crusante are alleged to have evicted families from the area for not supporting them. Leaders not involved in the paramilitary training approached the commanders in an effort to stop the conflict. This failed, and the conflict escalated, resulting in two clear camps with two discernible leaders: the Crusante led by Nduna Maphumulo, and the Feranges led by Ntsizwa Nala. Nala was a former self-defence unit commander who had been integrated into the SAPS' VIP protection unit. He allegedly used his position to organise police raids against the Crusante. When Maphumulo—who became involved in common criminal activities—was killed by the police during a robbery, Nala was arrested for the murder and is now serving time in prison. The conflict between the two groups continues, however.

Many of those involved in the two sides are unemployed. Attempts are being made to induct some of them into the SANDF Service Corps in an attempt to dissolve the groups.

Exploratory research reveals some uncommon gang characteristics in KwaMashu

- They are often difficult to identify because, unlike most gangs in other areas, they generally do not wear or use visual identifiers in the form of 'uniforms', colours, gestures, or graffiti.
- They are often transitory in name or are simply nameless.
- More than 80% of serious crimes are committed by groups consisting of two or more persons according to the local police. This promotes the creation of criminal gangs.
- Gang formation is fluid and structure is informal. Gangs are often formed for a single objective and then dissolve once this has been accomplished. Most are not well organised and most of their crimes are opportunistic. Gangs are generally not involved in organised drug and weapon trafficking or protection racketeering.
- Alcohol, mandrax and, lately, crack cocaine are consumed by youth both inside and outside gangs. Drugs often trigger the rampage-style crimes committed by gangs.
- The reasons for committing crime vary from subsistence needs to rape to territorial rivalry and greed. Less serious crimes are often motivated by boredom due to a lack of recreational facilities.
- Their relationship with the community is ambiguous. Township residents are a market for goods stolen by gangs but are also victims of gang crime and violence.
- Gang members involved in serious crimes, such as rape and murder, appear to be getting younger.
- Access to firearms in KwaMashu is high and accounts for the increased prevalence of violent crime amongst youth.
- Awareness of being infected by HIV among gang members motivates sexual offences.

The KwaMashu gang monitoring system

Research into criminal gangs in KwaMashu in 2000 informed the development of a gang monitoring system (see box above). The system would provide 'early warning' of gang crime, and an intervention mechanism in the form of 'gang teams'. The teams would consist of community members such as residents, police officers, social workers or even celebrities. The system would also provide information for developing crime prevention strategies for the area.

Information would be collected on the gangs, their activities, environment and how they developed. The monitoring mechanism would also profile gangs and their relationships with other groups (see box below). The early warning and intervention system would aim to:

- Predict where gang crime and violence would occur.
- Identify and engage role-players to resolve sectional and territorial rivalries.
- Identify specific socio-economic causes of gang formation and activity.
- Divert gang members and youth at risk away from crime.
- Create a bridge between the police and residents, gang members, and youth at risk.
- Encourage and inform campaigns against drugs, violence and weapons.
- Encourage and inform mentorship programmes for gang members and youth at risk.
- Help gang members and youth at risk find access to help for drug and other social problems.
- Contribute towards the development of enforcement and prevention strategies that would prevent gangs developing into organised crime groups, and control the sale of stolen goods, and drugs.
- Provide information for use in the bail and parole hearings of gang members.

Four areas have been identified where a monitoring mechanism, covering the type of information in the box below, needs to be located: in the SAPS sectors across KwaMashu, the community policing forum, and schools through the Department of Education's Culture of Learning, Teaching and Service campaign.

Gang information matrix	
Gang profile information: Names Discernible organisational structure Leadership and member biographies Modus operandi Areas of operation, hangouts and retreats Allied gangs Enemy gangs Relations with residents	Gang involvement or trends relating to: Drugs Guns Stolen goods Vehicles Schools Transport nodes Shopping areas Territory
Gang relations with/and attitudes towards: Police/law Organised crime groups Political parties and government representatives Paramilitaries Youth clubs Vigilante groups Women	Law enforcement response: Current and historic information collected relating to specific allegations or investigations. Police responses to these crimes, and their impact on the gangs.

In addition, the monitoring information will be passed on to a community safety forum (CSF) that is being proposed for KwaMashu. The CSF, with its multi-agency composition, is best suited to developing co-ordinated crime prevention responses to the problems identified by the monitoring system (see chapter 5).

The idea of monitoring and predicting gang activity arose when residents and CPF members told NIM that they often knew when trouble was brewing in KwaMashu. News of disputes would filter through the community, and people would observe how and where youth or gangs were congregating.

Even police officers, who thought it impossible to predict gang related crime because of its largely opportunistic nature, acknowledged that residents often knew and warned them of trouble long before it occurred. It became clear that crime could be anticipated and preventive measures taken if appropriate mechanisms were located in the community, and the information generated was used expeditiously.

The gang monitoring system aligns NIM's monitoring approach with the requirements for crime prevention as outlined in the White Paper on Safety and Security.⁵ The project is ambitious and its success will hinge on partnerships with groups that NIM has no experience of working with. It will also require working with structures like community safety forums that are still in their early stages of development (see chapter 5).

Despite this, NIM was encouraged by the White Paper's promotion of a 'learning by doing' approach to crime prevention.³ Even if the monitoring mechanisms could not be fully developed or sustained, awareness would be raised about two important elements of crime prevention: the need for information systems that link community and police activities, and partnerships. These elements are considered below.

Lessons for prevention: information and partnerships

Creating sustained access to the crime prevention target group is essential. This was clearly demonstrated in KwaMashu when it became apparent that there were few documentary sources of information on the gangs and their activities. The problem was overcome through a number of informal partnerships set up with state service providers and the KwaMashu community police forum (CPF).

SAPS members at all levels showed great enthusiasm for the project. This was probably partly because, despite being aware of the problem, the police had not been assisted in understanding gangs or how to police them. NIM provided information to the police and an opportunity to exchange ideas and thereby support police efforts.

The KwaMashu CPF responded in an equally positive manner. From an early stage, NIM recognised that the support of both the SAPS and CPF was pivotal for the success of the project. This was confirmed by the consensus among other community groups about the necessity of involving the police and CPFs in solving the gang problem.

The information exchange approach helped to make links with other partners, and to advocate crime prevention by promoting the gang programme in an area where no such project had existed previously. But the most important contribution of the information exchange was the role it played in developing partnerships.

NIM had struggled to develop meaningful partnerships with government agencies other than the police. After initial consultations it became clear that many officials' ideas about the KwaMashu gang problem were outdated or based on the limited media reportage of the situation. There was also a general lack of understanding among non-governmental organisations and safety and security officials about each other's activities and methods of operation. Little value was attached to inter-agency and sectoral partnerships and few organisations had even explored the potential value of working in this way.

In a safety and security environment under tremendous pressure and undergoing considerable transition, ongoing interaction becomes even more important for the success of crime prevention projects. In the case of KwaMashu however, the incentives for working in partnership were perceived to be limited. Both NGOs and government had to be thoroughly convinced of the need to divert their attention from their line functions to deal with a relatively new challenge such as gangs.

This environment requires a forum, possibly at provincial level, that draws together government and non-governmental organisations concerned with safety issues. Such a forum would be of use even if it served only to increase the flow of relevant information. NGOs participating in the forum could assist in setting security priorities for the region. Activities could be better co-ordinated between civil society and state service providers, either through formal structures or informal support networks.